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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE DEPARTMENT
AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP

CONGRESSIONAL GLOBAL
HEALTH CAUCUS, CO-FOUNDER

October 16, 2009

The Honorable Peter Orszag
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Orszag:

As a former educator, Member of the House of Representatives Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee, and a member of the House Native American Caucus, I want to direct your attention to the lack of Recovery funding reaching our Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools.

These schools face the same hardships, if not much greater, as public schools. Approximately seven percent of our nation's American Indian and Alaska Native students attend school in the federally supported Indian education system. According to the Department of Education, student performance at these schools is lower than the performance of Native students attending public schools. For the 2005-2006 school year, 69% of BIE schools failed to make the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals, compared to 29% of all U.S. schools in the 2006-2007 school year. The national graduation rate for Native students was 50.0% for the 2005-2006 school year, compared to 76.1% for white students.

Under Title I of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), 1 percent of funding is allocated to the BIE and to outlying territories, and the BIE traditionally receives 0.72% by transfer to the Department of Interior. However, tribal governments and BIE schools are ineligible to access the State Fiscal Stabilization Funding (SFSF) under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), including the \$4.35 billion in Race to the Top grants. As a result, tribes and BIE schools are deprived of the same economic relief as public schools, despite the desperate need in Indian Country.

At the Department of Education (DOE), ARRA provides \$53.6 billion for the SFSF, a one-time appropriation program that includes formula funding and competitive grants. SFSF allocated one-half of 1 percent to the outlying territories, but there is no allocation that provides funding to the BIE or tribes.

The federal government has a trust responsibility for the education of Native students through the provision of direct educational services including the obligation of ensuring equitable educational quality and access. The current funding provided to tribally-operated and BIE schools through ARRA is not proportionally equal to the funding provided to public schools through the Department of Education.

For the future success of our Native students, I recommend a reservation of State Fiscal Stabilization Funds be allocated to the Department of Interior to provide support to BIE schools, including competitive and incentive grants that states may currently apply for through DOE. The Secretary of Education should reserve at least 1 percent but not more than 5 percent for payments to the Bureau of Indian Education to be allotted for activities consistent with SFSF.

Thank you in advance for working together to meet the needs of our Native students and to promptly direct SFSF Recovery funds to our BIE school system. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 225-6631.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Betty McCollum". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress